

Sunflower lessons go wanting: groups

Written by Taipei Times

Tuesday, 13 May 2014 08:10 -



Civic groups protest outside the Legislative Yuan in Taipei yesterday against the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) proposed amendment that would make it more difficult for voters to recall legislators.

Photo: Chen Chih-chu, Taipei Times

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) proposal to tighten rules for recalling legislators may face strong resistance from the public, civic groups said yesterday.

“On March 18, hundreds of people broke into the Legislative Yuan complex and took control of the legislative floor for nearly a month because we believed that our representative democracy is not working properly,” said Chen Wei-chen (陳偉成), a member of the Black Island Nation Youth Front (黑島青年聯盟), one of the central groups that took part in the Sunflower movement.

“I hope the KMT caucus has learned from the experience, and stops challenging the people,” he said.

The KMT legislative caucus' proposed revisions to the Election and Recall Act for Public Servants (公職人員選舉罷免法) require recall petitioners to submit photocopies of their national identification cards and letters of indemnity confirming that they signed the petition.

“Election and recall are both fundamental rights of the people, yet the requirements on people wishing to recall elected representatives is higher than when electing them. That does not make sense,” Taiwan Association of University Professors president Lu Chung-chin (盧永祥) said.

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"It's unacceptable that lawmakers are trying to raise the threshold, when the threshold is already too high," he added.

Writer and Constitution 133 Alliance cofounder Neil Peng (彭國治) said the amendment was in fact unnecessary.

"The KMT caucus said that requiring people to attach copies of their national ID cards and a letter of indemnity to their recall petition is to ensure all the information on the petition is correct," Peng said.

"Under current law, all information on petitions must be verified by the Central Election Commission as accurate. If there is something wrong on a petition, it will be taken out and deemed invalid, and if the petitioner purposely submits false information, they may be prosecuted."

"Therefore, the requirements under the proposed amendment are already covered," Peng said.

Attorney Huang Di-ying (黃帝英) said that the KMT's attempt to raise the threshold would only lead to stronger resistance from the public.

"I thought the KMT might have learned from the wave of protests over the past few months, but apparently it has not," Huang said.

"Instead of becoming more open, it's trying to build higher walls between the party and the people," he said.

"If the KMT insists on preventing people from venting their dissatisfaction within the constitutional system, people will have no choice but to rise up, resolving the problem through means outside of the system," he added.

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Meanwhile, organizers of the Appendectomy Project — the recall campaign whose name is a play on the Mandarin pronunciation of “pan-blue lawmakers” — said in a press release yesterday that they are staging a protest against the proposed amendment.

“We call for legislators to vote against the amendment proposal. And we’re organizing a petition to recall three KMT lawmakers — Alex Tsai (蔡啟芳), Lin Hung-chih (林滄敏) and Wu Yu-sheng (吳育生),” they said.

The three lawmakers were listed as the first batch of candidates whom the campaign singled out as failing the public and adhering only to President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) instructions.

Because KMT lawmakers have attempted to neutralize the campaign’s efforts through the tightening of petitions and questioning its fundraising activities, the project is seeking cooperation with groups nationwide to boost its momentum, the organizers said.

The Black Island Nation Youth Front yesterday threw its support behind the campaign and warned KMT lawmakers against taking the campaign lightly.

The student-led group said in a press release that KMT lawmakers have not only forgotten why the Sunflower movement broke out in the first place, but have also tried to “push the boundaries by testing the limit of Taiwanese tolerance.”

“People’s rights to election and recall are protected by the Constitution. When the KMT tries to take those rights away from the public, it will mark the beginning of a constitutional crisis, as well as the collapse of Taiwan’s democracy,” the group said.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2014/05/13](#)